

**Advent Lutheran Church: Censorship – 4<sup>th</sup> Letter – November 31, 2011**

To: Advent Lutheran Church Council,  
James Cassens, Mark Dentler, Tim Heine, Peggy Leonhardt, Leslie Holmes, Rodney  
Leonhardt Jr., Betty Louis, Terry Rodgers, Joel Vest, Shirley Taloff  
5820 Pinemont Dr, Houston, TX 77092

Cc: Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631

Fm: Charlie Dean, member of Advent Lutheran Church, Houston, TX

Date: November 31, 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen of our Church Council:

This is the **fourth letter in a series** addressing **Council's censorship of non-exempt material** and the controversy growing out of it. It is my intent, by posting this on the Internet, to show that there is a process by which a lone church member can hold officers accountable, and especially so when the process has been hijacked by those who control it.

In this letter I will address another allegation against Council officers:

**Bullying and claiming false authority**

It was also part of the scheme that officers would use their offices to bully and intimidate in order to enforce their censorship policy. This was done, among other ways, with a letter dated 01/19/2011 and with a meeting on 11/03/2011.

**The letter of 01/19/201:**

It was part of the scheme that an officer would draft a letter to me, making an assortment of alludings to authority, and arrange for 15 other officers to sign the letter with him. This was intended to bully and intimidate me into ceasing my activities. I believe some signors were simply unable to read and adequately understand the governing document of Advent. It is quite disturbing that a total of 16 officers would sign such a letter, and this shows—regrettably—how officers can be bullied, intimidated, and manipulated by one or more other officers, as well as how unknowledgeable some are about the source of their authority. Surely the one or two involved in drafting had to know of the complete lack of connection between the letter and Advent's Constitution.

I suppose the missing link between the letter and the Constitution should be no surprise, as the underlying problem is abuse of authority and there is no support for this in Advent's constitution. Even if I had signed the letter as requested, it is questionable what it would actually "acknowledge."

The first paragraph of the 01/19/2011 letter speaks of “understandings and expectations of members of Advent Lutheran Church. We believe these to be fundamentally reasonable, normal and customary of most organizations religious or not. As the council of Advent elected and empowered by the congregation to represent them, we ask that you consider this letter carefully.” The letter of 01/19/2011 is devoid of any link to the governing document of Advent Lutheran Church. Any “understandings and expectations of members of Advent Lutheran Church” ought to derive from the governing document of Advent. To say that “these [are] fundamentally reasonable, normal and customary of most organizations religious or not,” completely misses the notion that Council should be guided by Advent’s governing document. Simply doing what other organizations might do is not good enough. It is true that “the council of Advent [was] elected and empowered by the congregation to represent them,” however the governing document is conveniently ignored.

In the second paragraph, Council again refuses to put certain matters on the agenda like I requested some time ago. Council’s letter of January 19, 2011 shows that it (1) ignores Advent’s governing document, (2) fails to put matters on the agenda, (3) fails to allow me to address Council, (4) continues to censor non-exempt material, (5) uses the power vindictively to silence me, and (6) hijacks the procedure of communicating with Council. I gander that most recipients of such a letter would feel they were a direct object of an old Anglo-Saxon transitive gerund.

On page 2 of the letter, I am supposed to agree to “abide by [Council’s] decisions and request” and so forth. This is supposed to be “a new beginning of an effective partnership and relationship ... in our community of hope, making Christ known.” The letter fails to explain how any “decisions and request” or any “partnership” might be linked to Advent’s governing document. Generally, the 01/19/2011 letter allows a peek into the emotional disarray of Council officers as they try to deal with open criticism against them.

### **The meeting of 11/03/2011:**

A further part of the scheme involved a meeting on 11/03/2011, when Pastor Beck and I were to meet. Unbeknownst to me, James Cassens and Mark Dentler surrepticiously planned to attend. Pastor Beck was acting on the order of James Cassens, and used an outline (agenda) for conducting the meeting which lasted close to an hour. Pastor Beck did almost all the talking, pausing a few times to have Mark Cassens affirm what he was saying. James Cassens took minutes while Pastor Beck spoke. At the meeting of 11/03/2011, Council’s letter of 01-19-2011 was raised. I pointed out the missing linkage between the letter and the Constitution. When the meeting was over, Council still retained its censorship policy. The only significant thing accomplished was that I was told that hardcopies were available for viewing, with restrictions (censorship policy) on making copies. Digital material is almost completely censored.

The meeting of 11/03/2011 Pastor Beck, James Cassens, Mark Dentler was designed to be intimidating. It was a way to have power over me for an hour. Had I been much younger, it would have been very effective; I would have felt like an outside, uncomfortable, and scared. Under the instant circumstances, the tactic has the opposite effect on me. I realize that Pastor Beck had to call the meeting and follow the agenda that was given to him.

I am fortunate that I have the wherewithal to deal with this situation. I realize that many

members of this church would simply give in and give up. As I engage in this controversy, I intent to benefit those people. One problem with overcoming censorship is overcoming its inertia. Decisions by folks in high places, even when based on ignorance and arrogance, tend to have a life of their own. Once false authority is acquired through bullying and intimidation, such power becomes resistant to change. One of the easiest ways, though, to counteract this is to simply expose it for what it is.

#### **A bit of levity**

Council's think tank seems to be mighty dry. Here is an inspirational song for adding a bit of liquid to the tank; not too much though. ***Moonshine Hollow*** by Jimmy Martin and Sunny Mountain Boys, < [http://youtu.be/R7PaIAOjC\\_Y](http://youtu.be/R7PaIAOjC_Y) />.

In light of Council's failure to provide an explanation for its censorship of non-exempt material, I looked for an explanation elsewhere. I believe I found one. An editor for *The Redneck Lutheran Lowdown* had an interview with a church leader of another Lutheran church about a similar censorship problem. It might be instructive in our present controversy. The interview follows.

\*\*\*

## The Redneck Lutheran Lowdown

Interview with Chummy Editor and Otto Autocrat, councilmember of the Hardcore Lutheran Church.



Chummy Editor



Otto Autocrat

- Chummy: Hello, Otto. I'm looking forward to our interview.
- Otto: Me too.
- Chummy: Are yall still jiving to the Deep Elum Blues when you pass the collection basket?
- Otto: Sometimes. We find gospel songs to be motivational. You got to keep 'em motivated.
- Chummy: Otto, you know we're still talking about censorship at Hardcore Lutheran Church.
- Otto: Yes. We only want one version of the truth at Hardcore, and that's our version. We do what's necessary. That's where censorship comes in handy.
- Chummy: Would that version of the truth be apocryphal or journalistic?
- Otto: I don't care as long as it's our version. We're good at redirecting the conversations to draw attention away from undesirable talking points.
- Chummy: I'm learning a lot from you about how to manage people.
- Otto: We do this by establishing multiple grammatical or symantical interpretations for the same talking points. Then we pick out one interpretation that could be construed to have nothing to do with the talking point that we don't like. We got our own talking points see.
- Chummy: Amazing.
- Otto: We're just redirecting folks's attention from one subject to another. From one mission to another you know.
- Chummy: I'm impressed.
- Otto: Once we implement something, we don't want anybody to question it. That's why it's important to explain things real simple as though you're talking to a dumb person.
- Chummy: Why not explain it to for a real smart person?
- Otto: Because somebody might understand something we don't want 'em to think about.

Chummy: Otto, do you consider non-exempt documents as explanatory?

Otto: Yes, I do. That's why we restrict that stuff. We don't want folks to go to thinking about the wrong kind of stuff.

Chummy: But, Otto, you're talking about non-exempt material.

Otto: Yes, and they ain't nobody except us head cronies that's been exempted to have the stuff. We don't let just any bonehead have access to our stuff.

Chummy: Who decides who's exempt?

Otto: We do. We've got the power to do it. We got our authority. In addition to that, we have a body of customs and regulations which we have adopted. If we was to need something else we'd adopt it too. Some of our customary authority goes back to the time of Sir William Jones.

Chummy: Do you really let boneheads go to yall's church?

Otto: Yeah, we let boneheads in. And some of 'em have quite a bit of money.

Chummy: I suppose you're gonna tell me how to separate a bonehead from his money.

Otto: Yep. Even a bonehead is mindful of having money. But we use management tactics to separate the act of having money from the mindfulness of money. Once that happens, most boneheads just put money in the collection basket without a second thought.

Chummy: That is amazing. You're so knowledgeable.

Otto: Not giving out documents is kinda like a father withholding allowance until his son cleans his room. Church members have to earn what we give 'me.

Chummy: How could a church member earn, for example, a copy of the latest minutes of yall's Congregational Council meeting? And maybe other documents used in that meeting?

Otto: I would not be eager to release that. It would be too political and it might lead to argument which we don't tolerate at Hardcore.

Chummy: Well, what can a church member do to earn anything? Any document?

Otto: He could start by coming to church on time.

Chummy: Yep, if there's one thing that gets my goat, it's stragglers at church.

Otto: And the next thing is to avoid stirring up trouble. And then bring money.

Chummy: Otto, we are slap out of time. Thanks for the interview.

\*\*\*